

Challenge from the Right 1890-1904

KAUTSKY AND HIS NEW WIFE settled in Stuttgart in late 1890, shortly before the expiration of the antisocialist law. In the next quarter century the SPD grew into a massive party, and Kautsky's reputation grew with it. During these years he became an important figure in the international movement as well as the leading theorist of the SPD. His international prestige was largely a product of his relationship with the German party, and his place in the SPD derived from his alliance with Bebel, his skill as a polemicist, his control of the *Neue Zeit*, and his role as editor of the Marx *Nachlass* ("literary estate"), especially volume four of *Capital*. Kautsky drafted much of the official program the SPD adopted in 1891, aided the Austrian and Hungarian parties with their programs, and corresponded with the leading figures of virtually every socialist party in the world. At congresses of the Second International and in his private correspondence and public writing, he was frequently called upon to arbitrate theoretical disputes, to hand down authoritative judgments as the successor to Marx and Engels. According to one prominent historian of Marxism, during these years Kautsky "helped turn Marxism from an esoteric system into the doctrine of a gigantic political movement."¹

Under the antisocialist law, the electoral fortunes of the SPD had increased steadily. This trend reached a climax on 20 February 1890, when the SPD became the largest party in the Reich, receiving over 1.4 million votes. With the lapse of the law the party continued to grow, surpassing 2 million votes in 1898, 3 million in 1903, and 4 million in 1912. At the same time, party and trade-union membership increased enormously, as did the bureaucracies of both organizations. But the euphoria induced by this growth did not completely mask the malaise and discontent within the party before 1914. Electoral success and

bureaucratic growth increasingly threatened the supposed revolutionary posture of the party as integration into the prevailing system replaced intransigent opposition. Greater size endangered the unitary nature of the party as the south German socialists increasingly pursued independent policies. Despite its status as a social and political pariah and its negligible political power, the SPD was a focal point in the politics of the Wilhelmian Reich. The antisocialist law, the "new course" of Wilhelm II, the election of 1907, and Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg's concern with the party all attest to the SPD's importance in the formulation of official and unofficial policy. But this negative role did not satisfy those within the party who hoped to make it an effective political force. The increase in votes did not yield a comparable increase in mandates; not until 1912 did the party have the largest Reichstag delegation, 110, barely a quarter of the total. Even an absolute majority would have meant little in the pseudorepresentative Reich. Moreover, by 1912-1913, the SPD's steady growth was slowing up; the party had apparently reached a saturation point, beyond which lay stagnation.²

Party developments after 1890 intensified the moderate-radical differences that had characterized German socialism since its beginnings. Electoral success, a rising standard of living, and the conservatizing influence of bureaucratization strengthened the moderate forces, while the persistent ostracism of the SPD, the periodic violence of labor disputes, frustration with lack of power, and, after the turn of the century, the debate over imperialism, all fed the so-called radical fraction. During the years before the First World War, the moderates constituted the right wing of the party; the radicals were the left wing. Until the emergence of revisionism in the late nineties, right and left most often indicated attitudes toward party tactics and views of the nature and goals of the party. The right wing tended to concentrate exclusively on parliamentary activity, gradual reform, and the expansion of the party's appeal, especially to the peasantry. The left wing, while not rejecting parliamentary activity, tended to call for extraparlimentary action as well, drastic political reforms to alter the nature of the Reich, and preservation of the exclusively working-class character of the party. From 1890 to 1904, Kautsky devoted most of his time to fighting what he considered the pernicious tendencies of the right. These tendencies included support for state socialism, appeals to the peasantry, and overemphasis on the efficacy of parliamentary reform. After the mid-nineties, Kautsky also struggled against Bernstein's revisionism, the first and only theoretical attempt to justify the right wing of the SPD. Not until after the 1905 Russian revolution

did an SPD left wing begin to emerge as distinct from Kautsky's position, and not until then did he feel compelled to distinguish his own position as centrist, between the traditional deviations to the right and the new deviations to the left.

Editing the *Neue Zeit*

From his return to Germany in 1890 until he lost the journal in 1917, a great deal of Kautsky's time was devoted to editing the *Neue Zeit*. This job entailed a staggering amount of work. In 1892, he reviewed nearly five hundred unsolicited article manuscripts, over three hundred of which were returned. These unsolicited articles often required sharply worded responses in order to clarify positions of the SPD. Even articles Kautsky solicited did not always work out as expected. In late 1893, he rejected as unacceptable an article about Lessing from Paul Ernst, a dramatist-critic associated with the left wing of the Berlin party. Kautsky had expected an article based on the materialist conception of history, but found that Ernst was not of that school of thought. Such incidents made him suspicious of those intellectuals who were not full-time adherents to the cause. Kautsky's editorial responsibilities also included an enormous amount of correspondence; in 1895 he estimated that he wrote approximately one thousand letters per year, and in September 1896 he was writing about twelve letters every day. Kautsky also received a large number of inquiries from people he identified as "bourgeois and students," who asked about such things as value theory, "our relation to ethics," and other matters. These inquiries often required article-length answers and sometimes consumed more time than either editorial or private correspondence. Their great number also led Kautsky to admit reluctantly that the majority of readers of the *Neue Zeit* were bourgeois, not workers as he had hoped.³

During most of his years at the head of the *Neue Zeit*, Kautsky complained periodically of being overburdened with work. Though he always had co-workers to assist him, not until 1899 did he have coeditors whom he felt he could entrust with editorial responsibilities. Again and again he complained that he was prevented by the burdens of the *Neue Zeit* from pursuing his own theoretical development. Especially during the first three or four years after the return to Germany, he felt that he wasted time with routine work, with reading "bad manuscripts, bad brochures, and bad newspapers," and that such work was causing him to decay theoretically. However, his capacity for work usually was more than a match for the demands made on him. At one

point in 1896, he was working on seven different projects—two books, two articles, two revisions of previous works, and a translation of a series of articles from the Marx *Nachlass*—as well as keeping up his editorial work. This capacity for hard work once led Adler to exclaim: "You are simply a human demon! If I had your strength, or even a tenth of it!"⁴

Not just the work of editing a weekly bothered Kautsky; he was even more upset with having to live in Stuttgart. He had agreed to move back to Germany with the expiration of the antisocialist law in part because he recognized that, as far as socialism was concerned, Germany was where the action was. He soon discovered, however, as he had during his earlier residence, that Stuttgart did not share in much of the action of German socialism. In the 1890s, it was an isolated, backward city on the edge of the rural splendor of the Black Forest region in southern Germany. It had neither a vigorous socialist circle nor sufficient research facilities, the only things that would have made living there palatable to Kautsky. London had Engels and the British Museum; Vienna had family and friends; Berlin was the center of German socialist activity. Kautsky would have preferred any of these three great cities to Stuttgart, but several factors worked to keep him and his family there until 1897.⁵

Kautsky was dependent on the *Neue Zeit* for a regular income. Dietz had made the departure from London more attractive by guaranteeing Kautsky 3,000 marks per year, and on 1 October 1891, this figure was raised to 5,000 marks. The increase was most welcome as the Kautsky family was growing rather swiftly. In February 1891, the first of three children, all boys, was born, and on 13 January 1892, the second, Karl Kautsky, Jr., made his appearance while his father was in London for a brief visit. The proximity of the two births led Karl, Sr., to exclaim in a letter to Engels: "Holy Malthus, pray for me!" The responsibilities of a family made him more cautious about abandoning Stuttgart and the *Neue Zeit* than he might otherwise have been.⁶

Both Dietz and Kautsky agreed that editing the *Neue Zeit* as a weekly required the editor's presence in Stuttgart, and this further limited Kautsky's ability to get away from provincial Swabia. He could leave Stuttgart for extended visits to London and Berlin only if he could find a coeditor whom he trusted. For a time in 1892, Kautsky and Engels thought they had found such a man in Conrad Schmidt. But Schmidt (1863–1932), once identified with the left wing of the Berlin party organization, could not be persuaded to give up plans to move to Zurich and be a *Privatdozent*. After Schmidt, several men were considered, including Bruno Schoenlank, Heinrich Braun, Franz Mehring,

and Max Schippel, but all were found wanting for one reason or another. Though Kautsky would have gladly accepted Bernstein as a coeditor at any time before 1897, he was under indictment for *lèse-majesté* and not free to return to Germany until 1901.⁷

Three other options existed for Kautsky which would have allowed him to leave Stuttgart and have more time for his own theoretical work. One was to change the *Neue Zeit* back into a monthly; another was to move the journal's headquarters to Berlin; and the third was simply to give up publication. The first of these options received a great deal of attention from Kautsky not only because it would have freed him of burdens, but also because he and Dietz differed on how to solve another problem, namely overcoming the *Neue Zeit's* chronic deficit. Both men recognized, as did virtually everyone associated with the journal, that it was neither read by workers nor subscribed to sufficiently to be self-supporting. One critic suggested that the *Neue Zeit* could just as well be published in Kamchatka for all the foreigners who wrote for it, and Bebel complained that the journal was not topical enough. But Kautsky contended that when he called on these critics to contribute articles that would overcome these weaknesses, none was forthcoming.⁸

Since the *Neue Zeit* was not an official party organ, its losses were underwritten not by the party, but by Dietz privately. Dietz's solution to the deficit was to change the content of the journal, to appeal to a greater number of subscribers by running short articles concerned with subjects of more immediate interest. Kautsky agreed that this would probably increase circulation, but he had two objections. First of all, he argued, in order to become more topical the *Neue Zeit* would have to be published in Berlin where its editor could keep on top of current developments. Second, while Kautsky wanted to move to Berlin, both he and Engels felt that popularizing the journal could only be done by sacrificing the best part of the *Neue Zeit*, and its *raison d'être*, the theoretical articles. Kautsky suggested that the monthly format be restored, and each issue enlarged, so that more space could be devoted to serious theoretical topics. He argued that this would streamline costs while preserving the journal's true value. If Dietz and Bebel felt a new weekly was needed, then a new one should be started without destroying the *Neue Zeit*.⁹

Abandoning his journal completely was the most extreme solution to Kautsky's discomfort with Stuttgart. But by late 1893, he had become so frustrated with the isolation of the town that he announced that he was moving to Vienna in April 1894, whether or not a suitable replacement had been found, and whether or not it would mean the

end of the *Neue Zeit*. In fact, of course, he did not go to Vienna and did not give up his journal. Although his frustration and sense of isolation were real, his commitment to the cause of advancing and strengthening Marxism was even stronger. He was acutely aware that Marxism did not dominate the German party and that among the party and trade-union rank and file, and particularly among the unorganized workers, no theory carried much weight. His conviction that the *Neue Zeit* was the only Marxian journal in Germany convinced him that to give it up would be a death blow to Marxism there. However much he wanted to leave Stuttgart, and he sincerely detested living there, his sense of duty to the workers and to Marxism prevented him from taking the final step of departure. In a letter to Adler announcing his decision not to come to Austria, Kautsky explained that he had come to the realization that the only way he could leave Stuttgart was to give up the *Neue Zeit*. That he could not do, he wrote, because "I am too much [a] church father."¹⁰

Not only was the *Neue Zeit* the sole organ of Marxism in Germany, it also provided many of the party's leading intellectuals with the lion's share of their income. In addition to Kautsky, Bernstein, Schippel, Mehring, and Bebel were also largely dependent upon it. This was one of the major reasons Dietz continued to carry the journal's substantial yearly deficit, and it was apparently the decisive reason for the changes made in the journal in August 1895. After almost five years of steady hounding from Kautsky to change things, after nearly as many years of dissatisfaction with the sales and appeal, though not the quality, of the *Neue Zeit*, on 2 August, Dietz, Bebel, and Kautsky met to discuss three proposals: (1) shifting the journal to Berlin; (2) converting it into a monthly; and (3) reorganizing payment for articles and raising the price per issue. Point one was rejected quickly because all three men agreed that the move would mean an increase in costs that neither Dietz nor the party was willing to shoulder at that time. Kautsky argued vigorously in favor of point two, but Dietz and Bebel would not hear of it. Rather Kautsky got a long lecture from Bebel about not letting personal wishes overrule the fact that as a weekly the *Neue Zeit* supported important party intellectuals, especially Bernstein, Mehring, and Schippel.¹¹

Agreement was reached on point three—the price was raised from 20 to 25 pfennig, which would give Dietz an increase of 1.5 marks profit per yearly subscription. Figuring the present circulation at forty-five hundred, subtracting from five hundred to one thousand subscribers who would balk at the price increase, but adding five hundred new readers who would come over to the *Neue Zeit* with the end of Bernstein's *Sozialdemokrat*, Kautsky calculated that Dietz would

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Cover of Die neue Zeit, 14 July 1900

net an increase of about 6,000 marks per year. In addition Bernstein and Mehring would each take a cut in pay of 100 marks per month for their work on the *Neue Zeit*, bringing their yearly stipends to 3,600 marks each. Bernstein would make up the loss by receiving an additional 100 marks a month from the official party journal, *Vorwärts*, and Mehring would receive a similar amount from the *Wahre Jacob*, another party journal published by Dietz. Finally, Schippel's honorarium from the *Neue Zeit* would be increased by 75 marks per month. These changes would save Dietz 1,500 marks per year, which, when added to the 6,000 marks increase in income, amounted to a potential net increase of 7,500 marks per year. Kautsky expressed the hope that this amount "may cover the deficit" of the *Neue Zeit*. Although he was greatly disappointed that he and his family would have to spend at least another year in "Stukkert," he was grateful that his own salary was not reduced. The intricacies of this settlement reveal the extent to which the *Neue Zeit*, though a private undertaking, was tied to party affairs. Furthermore, the journal was obviously important as a means of support for party intellectuals. The 1894 SPD congress had debated the issue of the level of pay for party intellectuals, with the party leadership successfully defeating the minority proposal to limit salaries to 3,000 or 4,000 marks per year. Kautsky's 5,000 marks was a comfortable income, though not high. Editors who oversaw dailies earned at least 5,500 marks, and Liebknecht got 7,200 for his work on the *Vorwärts*.¹²

Less than a week after this complicated agreement was reached, Tussy Marx threw a wrench into the works by asking Kautsky to assume primary responsibility for editing the Marx *Nachlass*, of which she had recently assumed control following Engels' death. Though Kautsky had agreed to accept the August settlement for at least a year, Tussy's offer changed matters considerably, and from late August through the spring of 1896, he vacillated between going to London and staying in Germany with the *Neue Zeit*. By February, Tussy was growing annoyed with his indecision, which resulted from his perennial money difficulties and his need to measure the relative importance of the *Nachlass* work against that of the *Neue Zeit*. The money issue centered on three things: how much the eventual publisher of the fourth volume of *Capital* would be willing to pay Kautsky for editing it; whether additional guaranteed sources of income could be found; and whether Dietz would continue the *Neue Zeit* after Kautsky's departure and pay him 150 to 200 marks per month as a permanent contributor. The matter of a publisher was not settled until long after Kautsky had decided not to go to London. Adler offered him 100 marks per month

to be London correspondent for the *Arbeiterzeitung*, but other potential sources of income remained too indefinite to allow him to commit himself fully. The decisive factor was Dietz's attitude toward the *Neue Zeit*, and he threatened to end the journal if Kautsky went to London. Karl felt that the *Nachlass* work was very important and prestigious, but his own journal was even more critical to the cause of Marxism in Germany.¹³

Though Kautsky announced at least twice during the spring of 1896 that he definitely was moving to London, regardless of the fate of the *Neue Zeit*, he never made the move. For a time Dietz strongly hinted that he would be willing to convert the journal back into a monthly, keeping Kautsky as editor in absentia. Then he gave in to Kautsky's earlier demand and announced in early May that the *Neue Zeit* headquarters would be transferred to Berlin beginning 1 October 1896. Kautsky and his family did not move until 1897, but the chance to get out of Stuttgart permanently, coupled with the uncertainty of income in England, turned him against going to London. The 1895 party congress debate on the agrarian question had further reinforced his belief that the *Neue Zeit* had to be preserved, and when Dietz threw in Berlin as additional bait, Karl began to make plans to try to edit the *Nachlass* during brief visits to London while keeping up with full-time obligations to the *Neue Zeit*.¹⁴

Kautsky's conception of the nature and function of the *Neue Zeit* and of party intellectuals was constantly reinforced by party developments during the period 1890 to 1904. Debates on the party program and the agrarian question, the increasingly complex problems of tactics for the rapidly growing socialist movement, and above all, the revisionism crisis of the late nineties, served to strengthen his conviction that the only function of socialist intellectuals was to provide clarification for the workers in matters of theory. This view was predicated on two assumptions. First, "the class condition of the proletariat produces socialist *inclinations*, but not socialist knowledge." Second, without theory the German movement would "come to an English conception of things which only concerns itself with the tangible, the obvious, the practical, to the conception of the old unionism." Kautsky felt that one of the major problems in the German movement was that "this conception lies very near many of our people, namely the determined trade unionists; we must do everything to root it out because it is the grave of revolutionary thinking." He was willing to tolerate a good deal of theoretical inconsistency among the workers, but not among party intellectuals. The workers, because of their class instincts, were at least predisposed to the correct course, but "the confused intellectual has no

such compass, he gropes helplessly in the dark." He felt that good-hearted but wrong-headed intellectuals did damage to the socialist cause. Thus when his close friend, Heinrich Braun, founded a journal that boasted of its eclectic theoretical basis, Kautsky sharply condemned the undertaking for extolling "characterlessness as a special virtue." For ten years the *Neue Zeit* had labored "to cram the people with Marxism and to bring an end to coquetting with Messieurs Rodbertus, Dühring, Schäffle, etc." Braun had founded a journal that would "ruin the laboriously gained, not altogether fixed clarity and . . . make our work futile." Kautsky trusted to objective conditions to generate energy and motion among the workers, but he clearly thought that the workers were to be channeled into proper courses by the theoretical dikes erected by socialist intellectuals. His view obviously demanded that intellectuals associated with the movement should espouse consistent, and preferably Marxian, positions.¹⁵

With the exception of the years of the revisionist debates (1898-1899, 1901-1903), Kautsky rarely spoke at party congresses. Just prior to the 1895 congress, where the agrarian question was argued at length, Karl reported to Luise that he was apprehensive because party comrades "think I have come with a big speech in my belly, [and] that is not agreeable." He was quite pleased that this speech came off as well as it did and surprised when a 1902 congress speech was well received. He was never part of the official party or congress leadership, though he did serve on various committees. Nor did he ever run for a Reichstag seat. When in 1890 Dietz proposed that he might become a German citizen and get elected as a representative from Stuttgart, Kautsky was cool to the idea. Three years later this suggestion was made again, and in rejecting it again he offered a very perceptive self-evaluation: "You do not need me in *parliament*. I am no speaker and even less a debater. The good thoughts always come to me *after* a debate. I am also no politician, neither a jurist nor an organizer. . . . I could only be a follower in parliament, and would play a mournful role, because one would expect something of me. It would go even more poorly with me than with [Paul] Lafargue, and I would, like him, forfeit my scientific efficiency under parliamentarism without exchanging it for something better." Though he toyed with the idea several times, Kautsky did not become a German citizen until after the fall of the Wilhelmine state. Until then his status as a foreigner ensured that he could not be politically active.¹⁶

The combination of Kautsky's conception of the function of the *Neue Zeit* and his aversion to personal, active participation in grass-roots politics reveals something about his attitude toward one of the

fundamental issues of Marxism, the relationship between theory and practice. While his view of the role of the *Neue Zeit* presupposed intimate cooperation between theory and practice, his attitude toward his own involvement in practice meant that he did not perceive the two as inseparably interdependent. Though he was aware that his theory suffered when he was isolated from the centers of action, he was never convinced that the perspective of distance and detachment was less important than the familiarity of immediate experience. He repeatedly emphasized that politicians and trade-union leaders got bogged down in day-to-day details at the expense of the larger overview. But as with many other conservatizing factors in the SPD after 1890, Kautsky only made perceptive observations about the increasing influence of Reichstag representatives and trade unionists; he did not suggest ways to counter this influence. As most of his more politically astute associates pointed out on many occasions, he was an inveterate optimist who thought all would go right in time. He demanded constant and careful attention to theory and did not argue that revolution would occur come what may. But he also failed to perceive that criticism without action would not stem the antirevolutionary tendencies within the party. In large part he did not see the latter because he was not an activist himself.¹⁷

The Party Program

At the last exile congress of the German socialist party before the expiration of the antisocialist law, held in St. Gall, Switzerland, in 1887, Ignaz Auer, Bebel, and Liebknecht were charged with drafting a new party program. The majority of delegates at this congress concluded that conditions in Germany and the party had changed sufficiently since the 1875 party program was adopted to require a new program. This commission was supposed to fulfill its charge by the following congress. But at that gathering in Halle in 1890, Liebknecht explained the failure to fulfill the charge in terms of preoccupation with survival and also the need to rethink things entirely with the end of the antisocialist law. Liebknecht's resolution calling for a new program vaguely mentioned that the Gotha program was out of date and promised that the party leadership would propose a new program at the 1891 congress. The discussion that came between the Halle congress and the adoption of a new program at Erfurt opened the door for Kautsky's emergence as the leading theorist of the party.¹⁸

Debate preceding Erfurt included a thorough airing of old programs, criticizing them in light of contemporary conditions, and then

proposing new program drafts which in turn would be criticized in the party press. All of the party journals and most of its intellectuals took part in this process, but none was more active than Kautsky in the *Neue Zeit*. His original plan, suggested by Dietz, was to run a series of articles by several different people, including Auer, Bebel, Bernstein, and Engels, which would discuss various aspects of the program. But when asked by Kautsky for a contribution, Engels replied that he was too busy with Marx's *Nachlass* to write a new article. Instead he sent the manuscript of a letter and comments Marx had written after the 1875 German party program was proposed. This work, now known as the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, had been circulated privately in 1875 among leaders of German socialism and was first published in the *Neue Zeit* in January 1891. Knowing full well that it was a potential bombshell, because the *Critique* harshly criticized the Gotha program and included disparaging remarks about Lassalle and some of the party leadership, Engels suggested in his cover letter that if Kautsky felt he could not print it, it should be sent to Adler to be published in Austria. But he concluded, "it is far better if it appears in Germany itself, and in the party organ especially founded for such things, the *Neue Zeit*." Though Kautsky was somewhat apprehensive about the possible impact of this document, he was also eager to make known Marx's attitude toward the old program.¹⁹

Isolated in Stuttgart, Kautsky was confronted on 8 January 1891 with a very important decision. Should the harsh criticism of the Gotha program be published in the *Neue Zeit* or not? On that day Kautsky wrote to Bernstein: "Hardly ever have I so painfully felt my isolation, and especially the separation from you, as today." He was certain that the *Critique* would help to win the majority of the party to his own position, but added that "one does not happily undertake such important action without having discussed it with a trusted friend or comrade." In a postscript to his letter, Kautsky alluded to Bernstein's continuing exile in London, and to the similar position he found himself in, by writing: "You yourself know best what it means to be isolated in a responsible position." Clearly he would have preferred to have his own decision to publish, which was apparently made immediately, reinforced by Bernstein, Bebel, and others. He explained to Bernstein that the *Neue Zeit* would carry the *Critique* for three reasons. First, Engels was willing to accept ultimate responsibility for publication. Second, Kautsky felt that "it would be deplorable if Engels were forced to publish a piece of the Marx *Nachlass*" in Austria through Adler. Third, Kautsky assumed that since the original letter had been intended for Auer, Bebel, and Liebknecht, as well as others, Engels

must have already notified Bebel of the imminent publication. Kautsky knew that some old Lassalleans would be offended, but the *Critique's* value outweighed such considerations.²⁰

Kautsky also wrote to Engels on 8 January, explaining that he was delighted with the *Critique* and would publish it. He asked if Engels had notified Bebel and Liebknecht and added that only some sharply sarcastic remarks about the program's authors would be edited out, for the sake of party peace. A few days later he sent Engels a further defense of the deletions. He also commented that Dietz had seen the proofs and had not been enraged by the article, much to Kautsky's relief. In his response to these two letters, Engels gave general approval to the sorts of deletions Kautsky proposed and added that he had just written to Bebel about publishing the letter. Because Liebknecht had made distorted reference to the contents of Marx's letter during the program commission report of the Halle congress, Engels felt that notifying Bebel beforehand of the publication of the *Critique* would have put him in an awkward position. Bebel, Engels contended, would have had to decide whether or not to consult Liebknecht, and the latter "would have moved heaven and hell to prevent the printing." With this letter, dated 15 January, Kautsky first discovered for certain what he had suspected for the past week: Bebel too was going to be surprised by the publication of the Gotha program criticism.²¹

What followed was a bizarre series of events that made the publication of Marx's criticisms far more disruptive for Kautsky than it should have been. Sometime between 15 and 25 January, Kautsky informed Bebel by letter that Marx's work would be printed, and Bebel responded that he was not familiar with the material. Then on 25 January, Kautsky sent the article proofs to Bebel in Berlin, and Dietz went to Berlin also. Only after meeting with Bebel did Dietz realize the full implications of publishing the *Critique*. However, though the two men apparently discussed the article on the twenty-fifth or twenty-sixth, not until the afternoon of 28 January did Dietz wire Kautsky to stop distribution of the issue carrying the article. By that time it was too late, and Kautsky knew that Dietz and Liebknecht, and maybe Bebel also, would be furious about not being consulted beforehand. To Bernstein, Kautsky commented that as a result of this affair, "perhaps I will come to London sooner than I thought."²²

A brief, but intense storm broke in SPD circles over the publication of the *Critique of the Gotha Program*. Although Engels steadfastly claimed responsibility, the majority of the SPD Reichstag *Fraktion*, including above all Dietz and Liebknecht, harshly chastized Kautsky as the villain. In the *Vorwärts*, the *Fraktion* denounced Kautsky for deception and

further assaulted him both by letter and verbally. Most of the rest of the party remained strangely silent, but the *Fraktion's* attack was severe. Kautsky asserted that he did not "care a straw for the *Fraktion*," but consented to write a conciliatory article anyway, for the sake of party unity. Privately he excused the *Fraktion* for what he called "one sound reason: their grandiose ignorance." Bebel's reaction upset Kautsky a good deal, especially since he had notified the party leader before the publication date that the article would appear.²³

Kautsky responded most vehemently to Liebknecht's attack. In a letter to Engels, he directly accused Liebknecht of having deliberately kept the original 1875 letter from Bebel. Though Liebknecht claimed that Bebel had been in prison when the letter from Marx arrived, Kautsky pointed out that Bebel had been released from prison in late April, and the letter was dated 5 May. Kautsky and Liebknecht had long been at odds, largely because Kautsky resented Liebknecht's unearned reputation as a theorist and Liebknecht resented Kautsky as a non-German upstart. But when Liebknecht upbraided Karl for indiscretion in not notifying Bebel in advance, Kautsky rejoined: "If Bebel did not know what was in the letter, for that I was not responsible, but the one who suppressed the letter from him. It will be seen if and what the old sinner [Liebknecht] will answer to that. This time he has trapped himself in his own failures." The Kautsky-Liebknecht relationship went downhill from this point on.²⁴

After this storm of protest quieted down, the party's preparation for the adoption of a new program proceeded quite calmly. Liebknecht drafted a proposal that appeared in the *Vorwärts*, but Kautsky thought it a very poor effort, designed only to avoid the disgrace of once again coming up with nothing. Since Liebknecht no longer had Marx's letters to plagiarize, Kautsky argued, his "vulgar socialism . . . [was] dull and absurd." By late September 1891, less than three weeks before the Erfurt congress, Karl was beginning to feel sorry for Liebknecht and his efforts to draft a new program. He reported to Engels that he had asked Bebel to speak to Liebknecht about these efforts, since someone "must save the old one from himself." And in the *Neue Zeit*, Kautsky subjected Liebknecht's proposal and others to a reasoned critique, discussing the origins and fallacies of state socialism and terroristic anarchism, the conservative potential of direct legislation, the economic and scientific basis of modern socialism (Marxism), the class nature of the state, the fallacy of the "one reactionary mass" slogan, and the major weakness of program proposals other than his own—they were overly long. He closed by insisting that in fact theoretical unity

prevailed within the party since most of the differences in the proposed programs concerned emphasis, not principles. Publicly Kautsky tried to play a conciliatory role in the weeks before the Erfurt congress, confident that his proposal, backed by Engels and the prestige of Marx, would win.²⁵

One particularly interesting aspect of Kautsky's discussion of the program proposals was his refutation of fatalism as one of the dangers of Marxism. This was one of the few times he directly confronted the determinist-voluntarist ambiguities of Marx's work. His major point was that while Marx taught that the direction of social development was not established arbitrarily, but out of necessity, he also taught that the motive force of development was "the struggle of opposites, the class struggle." Kautsky argued that these two positions constituted the dialectical core of Marx's theory and that the implicit voluntarism of the latter was as essential as the determinism of the former. Immediately after rejecting fatalism in Marx, he baldly asserted that "the final victory of the proletariat is inevitable," because the economics of modern capitalism made it so. However, he tied determinism in economics to voluntarism in politics by arguing that economically determined class struggles also have a political aspect:

Every class struggle is a political struggle. The proletariat cannot fight its economic struggles without political rights; it constantly encounters state power when it fights the exploiter. Gaining and using political rights [and] making state power subject to its interests are absolute necessities for the proletariat. It must therefore organize itself as an independent party to which falls the task of maintaining its interests in political life, which must devote itself to the end of conquering the state, this most powerful and only adequate lever to bring about the transfer of the means of production to the possession of all.²⁶

This argument rejected all fatalistic dependence on inevitable historical development. Kautsky also used this reasoning to refute the notion held by some "revolutionary enthusiasts" that better is worse, that is, that if their living conditions improve, workers will become less revolutionary. He argued that the success of positive work, or reform in the present society, would only teach the workers the value of organization. He contended this was so because class conflict, not poverty, was the root of the struggle for the workers' emancipation. By blending voluntarism and determinism in this manner, by asserting in

effect that the workers must work for their own inevitable conquest of the state and political power, Kautsky preserved the ambiguous and elusive quality of Marx's own work.

The Erfurt Congress

The 1891 party congress was held in Erfurt from 14 through 20 October. When the 230 delegates assembled in the Kaiser Hall, they found it draped with two banners, one saying Workers of the World Unite! and the other, The Workers Are the Rocks on Which the Church of the Future Will Be Built! The religious allusions were probably conscious: SPD congresses had an aura of spiritual renewal about them, and the host party organization often got carried away with enthusiasm. This gathering in the ancient Saxon city so closely associated with Luther was to be the congress at which the party ratified the scriptures of the movement. Kautsky captured the camaraderie of these annual gatherings when he wrote to Luise on the second day of the congress: "I am sorry not to be able to show you our comrades, a body of splendid fellows, as [they] are assembled here." Karl was amused by the fact that in a way he was attending the congress as the representative of the recently retired Bismarck. His mandate was from Lauenberg where the former chancellor's retirement estate was located. Karl Frohme, a long-time SPD Reichstag representative, had yielded his mandate to Kautsky so that the party's theoretician could be a voting participant in the congress.²⁷

Though much of the congress was spent in debate over the so-called *Jungen* revolt which centered in Berlin, the major task was the acceptance of a new party program. Paul Singer, the congress cochairman, opened the first session by declaring that just as the Halle congress had provided the party with new organization, so this one was to provide a new program "which scientifically and indisputably expresses our demands in clear and generally understandable form, and like the previous program will be a polestar for us in the struggles, a guide to victory." To accomplish this grandiose goal, a twenty-one-member commission, including Kautsky, Bebel, Liebknecht, and Vollmar, was elected on 18 October. Its job was to choose from the many proposals that had been offered and discussed in the party press before the congress. Of the four complete proposals seriously considered, the choice quickly narrowed down to Kautsky's draft presented in the *Neue Zeit* or the central committee's draft which had been written and defended by Liebknecht, but to which Bebel, Auer, and others had also contributed. The two drafts did not differ markedly in content, but

Kautsky's was much the shorter. At the commission's first meeting, a vote to accept one of these two drafts as a working basis resulted in a seventeen to four victory for Kautsky. Liebknecht was again offended by this vote and had to suffer the additional blow to his ego of reporting the commission's results to the entire congress. On the whole Liebknecht's presentation was judicious, though he only reluctantly credited the *Neue Zeit* draft for its brevity and clarity. The program was accepted by a very large majority on the last day of the congress after an extremely brief discussion. The general theme of unity and harmony, so laboriously maintained at most SPD party congresses, prevailed again.²⁸

In its final form the Erfurt program combined a theoretical section written mostly by Kautsky and a tactical section written mostly by Bernstein and Bebel. The theoretical portion was short, only two pages, and defined economic and political developments in what by then were orthodox Marxian terms. Engels had read Kautsky's final proposal, but of the four or five changes in wording he suggested, only one was incorporated into the program. Where Kautsky had referred to "the growth of the yield of human labor," Engels recommended substituting the more precise *products* for *yield*, and the program commission agreed. Kautsky reported to Engels after the congress that though acceptance of the *Neue Zeit* draft as a basis was a foregone conclusion once Bebel had thrown his influence behind it, hammering out the end product was not so easy, ironically because of Bebel's obstinacy on some points. Engels, Bernstein, and Kautsky had all protested when Bebel added the phrase "one reactionary mass" to the *Neue Zeit* proposal published in the *Vorwärts* prior to the congress, and Kautsky led an almost unanimous opposition to Bebel's effort to get the program commission to include this phrase in the final draft. Though Kautsky won on this point, he lost when he opposed Bebel over inclusion of a demand for the "free administration of justice." Thus though Bebel's support carried the day for Kautsky's program, the two men were not in complete agreement on specifics. The only major changes in the theoretical portion were the addition of two paragraphs, one emphasizing recurrent crisis in capitalist society, and the other accentuating references to the class struggle. The commission entrusted Kautsky with the duty of adding these sections. The theoretical portion in its final form pleased both Engels and Kautsky, though Engels found the practical demands "philistine."²⁹

After Erfurt, Kautsky was called upon by the party central committee to write a pamphlet that explained and amplified the program. This pamphlet turned into a book, *Das Erfurter Programm* (1892), which became Kautsky's most famous and most translated work.

In the introduction to a 1971 reissue of W. E. Bohn's 1910 English translation, Robert Tucker called this book "one of the minor classics of Marxist thought." It was also the first major work Kautsky published without receiving Engels' comments on the manuscript, and to this extent it constitutes the first work in which Kautsky presented his own Marxism without tutoring from Engels. However, *Das Erfurter Programm* did not, because of that, mark a turning point of any sort in Kautsky's theory. After eleven years of close guidance, Kautsky's Marxism did not differ from Engels' on any essential points.³⁰

Das Erfurter Programm had five sections. The first three described the origins and nature of the modern productive system and was a condensation of Kautsky's earlier treatment of this topic in *The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx*. As in the earlier work, Kautsky defined terms and described the process of the development of capitalism. Part four, "The Commonwealth of the Future," discussed the role of human action in history and the possible forms of the future state. Kautsky was definite on the former: "When we speak of the irresistible and inevitable nature of social revolution, we presuppose that men are men and not puppets; that they are beings endowed with certain wants and impulses, with certain physical and mental powers which they will seek to use in their own interest." But on the second subject he was more reluctant to commit himself. He argued that because social development was so complex as to preclude specific prediction and replication, "sketching plans for the future social state is about as rational as writing in advance the history of the next war." Nonetheless, because so many opponents of socialism demanded a model of the future society, he made certain suggestions about the decay of the family under capitalism and its disappearance under socialism, confiscation by the workers of the means of production (though not the property of small artisans and peasants), the tendency toward equalization of wages, and "not the freedom of labor, but the *freedom from labor*."³¹

Part five of *Das Erfurter Programm* discussed the nature of class relations and the tactics and channels of activity open to the workers. Kautsky emphasized the potential of labor organization, education, reform, and participation in parliament. But, he cautioned repeatedly, no one should "imagine that such [things] could delay the social revolution." His belief that this revolution did not necessarily have to be accomplished with "violence and bloodshed" was accompanied by the observation that "never yet was any revolution accomplished without vigorous action on the part of those who suffered most under existing conditions." Though he argued here that the proletariat was constantly

growing in number and strength, he also strongly implied that it was tending to greater isolation and increasingly confronted with a united and hostile opposition. Close reading of this portion of *Das Erfurter Programm* reveals the moderating impact of internal party and external governmental pressures on Kautsky. Here, as in so much of his other work, he tried to placate the right wing of the party without abandoning the revolutionary commitment of Marxism. In so doing he may well have laid the foundation for later charges of cryptorevisionism and antirevolutionary mentality, but in the context of the times, *Das Erfurter Programm* was a document that most party members and all bourgeois critics took to be revolutionary in implication and intent.³²

The Peasant Question

Most of Kautsky's time after 1890 was devoted to the *Neue Zeit* and the SPD, but another task undertaken in 1895 also demanded a great deal of his attention, namely editing the Marx *Nachlass*. In 1888, Engels had set Kautsky to work editing Marx's notes that would eventually constitute the fourth volume of *Capital*. However, the disputes over Kautsky's divorce had led Engels to suspend Kautsky's work on this manuscript. After Engels' death, possession of the Marx *Nachlass* passed to Tussy Marx and Laura Marx-Lafargue. Since Tussy lived in London where the *Nachlass* was, she assumed primary responsibility for organizing and publishing it. One of her first acts was to ask Kautsky to resume his work on volume four of *Capital*, and she eventually gave him first right of refusal on all the material in the *Nachlass* that was to be published. In addition to complicating Kautsky's living conditions, the editing added to his already enormous work load. He took it on gladly, however, because it was extremely prestigious and because he perceived it to be part of his responsibility as intellectual heir to Marx and Engels.³³

Difficulties in getting a publisher for the fourth volume contributed to Kautsky's final decision to stay in Germany rather than move to London. Tussy's hope was that Dietz could publish the work because of his close association with a strong working-class movement and because Dietz and Kautsky could work together. But once she began to investigate matters, she discovered that Otto Meissner, the original German publisher of *Capital*, had contractual rights to successive volumes of that work. The terms of the contract with Meissner were not generous enough to provide Kautsky with the income he needed in order to move to London. Tussy and Kautsky briefly tried a ploy to

convince Meissner that what Kautsky was working on was not volume four of *Capital*, but a discrete work. This failed when Meissner agreed to provide funding that would allow Kautsky to visit London for a few weeks every year in order to work on the manuscript. In the end Tussy admitted that though she would have preferred to have Dietz publish the work, she felt morally bound to let Meissner have it, since at the time the first volume of *Capital* was issued, he "was the only publisher in Germany who [would] even look at—let alone publish—[Marx's] work." After Tussy's tragic, early death, Laura reaffirmed Kautsky's position as editor. Ironically, the work was eventually published by Dietz in 1904–1910 as *Theories of Surplus Value*.³⁴

Party tactics, the nature and limits of activities a Marxian working-class party could pursue, and the development of theory were Kautsky's major intellectual concerns during the period 1890–1904. The tactical questions that demanded the most attention were the party's relationship to the agrarian population, the matter of cooperation with the bourgeoisie, and franchise reform. In this same period Kautsky engaged in a polemical exchange with the English socialist Ernest Belfort-Bax, in which the materialist conception of history was scrutinized. But the major theoretical event of these years was the conflict over Eduard Bernstein's revisionism. Kautsky's defense against, and attack on, Bernstein's new theory dominated the years from 1898 to 1903. This debate ended for a long time the very close personal relationship between the two men and forced Kautsky to clarify and strengthen his own theory. During these years his position as theorist of the party solidified, and, often prodded by Bebel, he repeatedly chastized the opponents of the official party line. Nearly all of the tactical and theoretical considerations pitted him against the right wing of the party, which tended to give his work a radical flavor that at times belied the moderation of his true position. This apparent radicalism was also reinforced by the peculiar nature of the German state and society in the years before World War I.

The peasant question was an old concern in German socialist circles. Before his conversion to socialism, Liebknecht was associated with the largely peasant Saxon People's Party, and the delegation he led to the 1869 Basel congress of the First International voted against an anti-private-property resolution because peasant influences were so powerful among early German socialists. The problem of the relationship between socialism and the peasantry has rather obvious and natural roots. The workers employed in the factories of fledgling industrial societies were often drawn from the peasant population. Rapidly growing industrial centers frequently were merely worker-

inhabited islands in a sea of rural agrarian villages. The powerlessness and poverty of both workers and peasants made them seem natural allies to early socialists still preoccupied with French revolutionary images of the people struggling against the oppressors of the old order. This image persisted for a long time in Germany, where even after the arrival of the industrial age, the quasi-feudal Junkers of Prussia dominated national politics.³⁵

Kautsky's concern with agrarian matters began early in his socialist career. At the time he entered the Austrian movement, peasant agitation and opposition to the government were characteristic of many areas of the Austrian Empire, especially his native Bohemia. Many Austrian socialists thought the party had a chance to win followers among the peasantry as well as the working class, but Kautsky did not belong to this group. Although he made specific suggestions about appeals that might be directed at the peasantry, in the late 1870s his estimation of social democratic prospects among the rural population was already low, and it declined steadily thereafter. He felt that the major problems were the peasants' obsession with private property and a limitless egoism that prevented them from being attracted by collective or futurist aspects of the socialist program. His specific ideas at this time included a call for the state to provide cheap credit, something he would later scoff at when suggested by others. He also envisioned "agrarian trade unions or farmers' leagues" that might serve as transitional institutions between private ownership and collectivization. He advised socialist agitators in the countryside to avoid attacks on religion or on child and female labor, but he felt that socialists should also consider using religious books as covers for their propaganda, arguing that "good aims justify any means that are not contradictory [to the ends]." At best Kautsky thought that the socialists, through hard work and serious propaganda, might neutralize the antisocialist prejudices among the peasants and maybe win an occasional passive supporter. But he was convinced that the hostilities between the city and the countryside could not be overcome easily.³⁶

Very quickly Kautsky abandoned even these halfhearted efforts to find ways to appeal for peasant support. Though he was sympathetic to the misery and hopelessness of the peasantry, he was convinced that it was doomed to disappear under capitalism and appalled by its apparent ignorance and conservatism. In an address to the "agrarian population," which appeared in the *Sozialdemokrat* in 1880, he called upon the peasants to recognize their own misery; he argued that they shared common enemies with the workers and therefore should make common cause with them. Employers, state officials, and the Reichstag

lawyers were the enemies of urban and rural workers alike, but the large landowners, whom the peasants looked upon as friends, were in fact their special enemies. The landowners told the peasants that the socialists wanted to burn, murder, and pillage, when in fact the socialists wanted to return to the peasants what the large landowners had taken away—the forests, the good land, the commons. Kautsky had earlier confessed to Engels that writing a good peasant pamphlet was very difficult because “one should make ‘positive’ proposals, for the peasants are not satisfied with general principles, but at the same time one should be neither utopian nor petit bourgeois.” And by 1880 Kautsky felt that the positive proposals socialists could make honestly were extremely limited. The fact of the matter was that as an emerging proponent of industrially oriented, progressive Marxism, Kautsky saw the peasantry as an archaic remnant of a dying economic order that was destined to disappear. The tremendous effort necessary to win a few peasants to socialism could better be spent organizing urban workers and fighting the bourgeoisie.³⁷

During the period of the antisocialist law, the SPD was too preoccupied with survival in the cities to spend much time worrying about appeals to the peasantry. But after 1890, the restoration of freedom to propagandize, coupled with the party's growing electoral success, once again brought the agrarian question to the fore. Socialist politicians, especially in south Germany, began to see the large peasant population as potential voters, and, led by Georg von Vollmar of Bavaria, they tried to woo the peasantry by supporting provincial agrarian reforms. Interest in the agrarian question was heightened in the early nineties when for the first time in German history an association of farmers, the *Bund der Landwirte*, was formed. This association, dominated by the large landowners of the East Elbe region, proposed to unite small and large farmers into an interest group that worked through politics to the advantage of agriculture. By 1894 the SPD forces that advocated appeals to the peasantry had gained sufficient backing to demand that the party adopt an agrarian policy to be grafted onto the Erfurt program. The passage at the 1894 Frankfurt party congress of a resolution calling for such action launched an extremely long, acrimonious, and eventually fruitless debate. The issues were the most fundamental ones of the nature of the party (popular democratic or working-class, federated or centralized), tactics (reform or revolution), nature of the state (potential tool or enemy of the party), and the relationship between theory and practice. Kautsky played a key role in this dispute.³⁸

Bruno Schoenlank and Georg von Vollmar set the tone for the entire

debate in the speeches they gave in defense of their resolution at Frankfurt. Schoenlank referred to the need to "complete and expand" the Erfurt program by adding an agrarian plank. He argued for plain language that would provide guidelines for practical agitation, not the vague theory which he implied characterized the rest of the party program. He also emphasized that the Berliners, who dominated the party, could not properly understand the peasant problem, that it had to be handled on a local level. Vollmar reinforced these regional and antitheoretical positions. He, too, strongly emphasized that the peasants were there to be won by the SPD, but not by the methods and people of the cities and not by theory. He proposed that the party had become so large that it needed a division of labor—one part concentrating on industrial workers, another on theory and literature, and a third on the agrarian question and agrarian agitation. Though Vollmar tried to give his position theoretical legitimacy by denying that the same laws of development applied to both agriculture and industry, his primary concern was clearly to win peasant votes and thus increase party strength. The Schoenlank-Vollmar resolution calling for the formation of a fifteen-member committee to draft an agrarian program passed with only thirty dissenting votes. The strongly practical bias of the committee was accentuated by the inclusion of eight Reichstag representatives and one member of the lower house of Saxony.³⁹

Kautsky's response to the call for an agrarian program came quickly, and he immediately identified what was for him the critical issue. Vollmar, as the leader of the south German, propeasant forces in the party, was trying to undermine both the working-class and the revolutionary character of the party. To Bernstein, Kautsky wrote:

Our party is actually the only serious oppositional party in the Reich; all the discontented flock to us, swelling our vote, but only a part of them become socialists. This situation cannot last much longer. It is necessary, if this situation is not to dissolve our basic character, that beneath [the SPD] rises a party of energetic discontents who, without being revolutionary, still make a more determined opposition than the bankrupt bourgeois democrats. And just in the south, where the class struggle is still not very harsh, where the workers stand very near the peasants and the petite bourgeoisie, such a party has good chances in the future. If we let Joerg [Vollmar] build such a party, for which he will be an idol, and if we do not try to stop him from doing it, then our party will approach his ideal.

Kautsky told both Bernstein and Engels that a split with Vollmar's peasant reformists would be better than a "brittle peace." He argued that if the issue was not forced to a split immediately, then the same battle would have to be fought again, perhaps in two years or less. In that time the opposition would probably grow stronger, because "Vollmar is a great peasant catcher."⁴⁰

A rather curious interlude interrupted Kautsky at the very beginning of what was to be a long, serious polemic against the right wing of the party. A bourgeois journalist turned socialist, Georg Ledebour (1850-1947), writing in the *Fränkische Tagespost* and the *Vorwärts*, claimed that Kautsky was "a hundred miles further right" than either Schoenlank or Vollmar, because the Erfurt program had claimed that the workers were not interested in seizing the small peasants' holdings after the revolution. Ledebour claimed that the two south Germans sought only to relieve the problems of the peasantry under capitalism, while Kautsky contended that small peasant holdings would persist under socialism, too. Thus Kautsky's theory gave cover to Vollmar's tactics. This criticism anticipated the later cryptorevisionist analysis of Kautsky's work. It also forced Kautsky to protect his left flank while attacking on the right, something that became common after 1905. In his rebuttal he pointed out that the Erfurt program did not claim that the small holdings of peasants had a future under socialism, but simply that the proletariat would have no need to seize these holdings because they would not long survive under maturing capitalism or socialism. The polemic eventually got very sharp, with Ledebour accusing Kautsky of acting like a priest and trying to be the pope of socialist theory. Kautsky ended the exchange because it had descended into personal attack and because he did not want to provoke a fight between the *Vorwärts* and the *Neue Zeit*.⁴¹

In his major assault on Vollmar and the right wing of the party, Kautsky felt hampered by three things. Once again he was keenly aware of the isolation of Stuttgart and wrote to Engels: "One is truly completely isolated here. . . . it is bad if one knows only his own opinion on a question." Second, he agreed with Paul Singer's observation that the SPD Reichstag *Fraktion* was more "Vollmarized" than the party as a whole. He objected to the prestige and influence of men who he felt did not reflect the will of the party membership. But above all else, Kautsky was angered by the Bebel-inspired effort of the *Vorwärts* to pretend that there was no disturbance in the party, calling this *Straussenpolitik* ("ostrich politics") that only played into Vollmar's hands. He felt that Bebel was adopting "an especially reformist attitude" in the matter, that "August sits this time with the Bavarians; he is the 'representative'

of the 'peasant king' of Bavaria, Joerg [Vollmar]." Such problems did not prevent Kautsky from vigorously fighting what he perceived to be destructive tendencies within the party.⁴²

Just as before the party program congress at Erfurt, so before the agrarian program congress at Breslau in 1895, the party prepared itself with analysis and criticism in the party press. Kautsky began his part in this debate by discussing the nature of the peasantry and landholding. Drawing from the official occupational census of 1882, he observed that while more than half of Germany's total of over 45 million people still lived outside the cities, only a little over 19 million engaged in agrarian undertakings, and almost 11 million of this latter group were agrarian wage laborers and their families. This meant that less than 8.5 million people could even begin to qualify as landed peasants and families, less than 20 percent of the total population. From this he concluded that the task of socialists in the countryside was simply one of raising the consciousness of the majority of the population that was really a rural proletariat. He also argued vigorously that the size of the rural proletariat would continue to increase while the number of landed peasants would decline as capitalism matured. Second, Kautsky contended, as he had for years, that among even the most depressed portions of the rural population, sentiments opposing socialism and favoring private property were so strong that the truth would not alter them. And third, he argued that since land was the most important means of production, in fact, the basis of all production, a socialist society without socialized landholding would be an absurdity. The land, like all other means of production, had to be held collectively after the revolution.⁴³

Once the program proposal was published in July, Kautsky turned his attention to specific criticism of that document. His first objection was that the proposed drastic changes in the tactical portion of the party program, including calls for democratization and social improvements couched in the language of bourgeois democrats and bourgeois social reformers, contradicted the most fundamental theoretical precept of the SPD, namely that it was the party of the class struggle and the proletariat. He argued that the Erfurt program had demanded two kinds of reform: those to the advantage of all citizens and those to the special advantage of the workers. But the new proposals would single out the peasants for special treatment. By including such clauses in its program, the party would deny its class nature; it would become indistinguishable from many other parties that appealed for general support. He rejected an implicit equation of democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat and contended that

Switzerland and the United States showed that a democratic state was not necessarily a proletarian state. The decisive interests of a class in political terms, Kautsky argued, were not those it shared as consumers and citizens with all other classes, but those which were peculiar to it alone. Social democracy had nothing of importance to offer the special interests of the peasantry in the present state form and social order. The agrarian commission's proposed program called for state socialism, the nationalization of forests, commons, water power, mortgages, and other things. Kautsky objected that this presupposed that the state was not a class state, that these steps would not simply increase the power of a capitalist-dominated tool. State-supported agrarian cooperatives were also part of the new proposals, but the party had already rejected the demands for state-supported workers' cooperatives that had been in the old Gotha program. In some ways Kautsky found the program superfluous, as when it called for special laws to protect agrarian workers. He argued that the Erfurt program demanded such laws for all workers, agrarian and industrial, and to the extent that the new clauses would protect the peasants as holders of private property, they contradicted the socialist ideals of the party.⁴⁴

With what he described to Luise as an effort to be conciliatory, Kautsky emphasized that the task confronting the agrarian commission quite probably was an impossible one. The amount of material it had to deal with was enormous; the commission, like the party as a whole, was not united on the peasant question; and even if the commission majority came up with a program, the party majority might not accept it. Kautsky contended that the commission had been asked to square a circle, to reconcile irreconcilables: "A social democratic agrarian program for the capitalist mode of production is an impossibility." He urged that the party agitate among the peasantry, but without promising things that could not be delivered. The peasants must be told that they were doomed, that they could not compete with large-scale, capitalist farms. He realized that this line was not very "practical," that it would not win many peasant votes, but argued that the time was not ripe for appeals that would win thousands of voters. He concluded: "We have to go to the country at first not in order to reap, but to sow."⁴⁵

Needless to say, Kautsky's arguments did not still the debate. The Breslau congress, which met from 6 through 12 October 1895, spent more than half its business sessions discussing the matter. Vollmar was ill at the time and did not attend the congress, but the commission's arguments were ably and prestigiously presented by Schoenlank, Bebel, Liebknecht, and others. Dr. Max Quarck formally presented the

agrarian commission report. In his speech, much of which was directed at Kautsky's preCongress criticisms, Quarck claimed that what was at stake was not "a few hundred thousand votes," but the future of humanity, which to a certain extent depended on the future of agriculture. He further argued that since the socialist parties of many other countries had agrarian programs, the principles of the international movement were not at stake on this issue. The only people upset by the proposed program, claimed Quarck, were "the agrarian Manchesterian comrades" of the German party, who had yet to realize that "nothing is accomplished by radicalism in words alone." After Quarck finished, Kautsky offered his own resolution calling for the rejection of the commission's proposal; it was signed by twenty-four other party members, including one member of the agrarian commission, Schippel, seven of the eighteen Reichstag representatives at the congress, and Paul Singer, a congress cochairman. Kautsky was pleased to report to Luise that seventeen people claimed the right to speak against his resolution and forty in favor of it.⁴⁶

Schippel delivered the major speech in defense of Kautsky's resolution, and in Vollmar's absence, Bebel delivered the major attack. Schippel denounced the agrarian program as unoriginal and contrary to the party's principles. He identified its origins with the younger party organizers who worked among the small peasants and wanted "to drive out the devil of the anti-Semitic agrarian movement with the Beelzebub of our own agrarian demands." Bebel began his speech by denouncing Schippel as a party newcomer and criticizing him for cooperating with the commission and then turning against it. His major substantive points were that realization of the entire agrarian program would not alter the course of economic development, but only relieve the suffering of the peasantry; that the program did not contradict party principles; and that it would not cost the workers anything. If, as Kautsky claimed, many of the proposals in the program would only strengthen the capitalist state, asked Bebel, why has the state not already taken such steps? Many things were already nationalized, like social insurance and the railroads, and the workers benefited from them; why should the peasants not also get some help from the state? Bebel concluded his speech with a warning to the party: If it expected to bring an end to the agrarian question by accepting Kautsky's resolution, the members would be disappointed, because it was an immediate and pressing problem that would persist until dealt with practically. Kautsky followed Bebel and primarily reiterated most of the arguments presented before the congress convened. Besides pointing out that Bebel had failed to mention that workers in na-

tionalized industries were not allowed to organize, Kautsky made two new points. First, the party was going at the whole thing backward. A declaration of principle was accepted at Frankfurt, and now the party was to decide on an agrarian program at Breslau; afterward, according to Bebel, the matter would be subjected to further study. Kautsky suggested that it would be more rational to study the matter thoroughly before making a decision on it. Second, Kautsky closed his speech by admitting that an agrarian program would win the SPD votes in the countryside, but argued that "at the decisive moment" the peasants would desert the party. In a rousing reassertion of the revolutionary roots of the party, he concluded: "We face great and difficult battles and must train comrades-in-arms who are resolved to share everything with us and to fight the great fight to the end."⁴⁷

Despite Bebel's prestige and persuasive speech, Kautsky's resolution passed by a vote of 158 to 63; it was one of very few party votes Bebel ever lost. The proportion of Reichstag members who voted against Kautsky's resolution was four times higher than those who voted for it, but only two of the twelve members of the party leadership opposed it. Most party members who had been or were to be associated with the right wing voted against the resolution, but many did not, including Blos and Geiser, Kautsky's old antagonists. Karl was immensely pleased with the congress because it had reaffirmed the party's class character and stopped the invasion of nonsocialist oppositional elements. Bebel, on the other hand, saw Breslau as a victory for dogmatism and a certain source of future divisiveness. Both men were wrong in part, and both erred in their evaluations of the party and the issue. Kautsky mistakenly assumed that the proponents of the agrarian program intended to abandon the party's commitment to the proletariat, when in fact most of them only sought to exploit other sources of discontent within the Reich. Only an enormously successful campaign among the peasantry could have changed the working-class nature of the party membership and leadership. Not even Vollmar had such illusions about how much support the SPD could win from the peasants even with an agrarian program. Even if appeals to the peasantry were successful, according to Kautsky's own theory the number of peasants would continue to decrease and the number of workers continue to increase. Kautsky also assumed that his distinction between electoral campaign appeals to the peasants and exclusion of peasant planks from the party program was one that rank-and-file members would perceive. But on this, as on many other issues, Kautsky was being far too subtle. Most of the

congressional delegates supported the Kautsky resolution because their cultural and emotional prejudices made them see the peasants as part of the backward-looking, archaic forces that kept workers and their party isolated and scorned. This was where Bebel made his mistake also. What he saw as dogmatism was in fact the powerful emotional identification of the delegates with the good cause of the industrial workers. The very institution of the annual congress served to reinforce powerfully the prevalent feeling among party members that they were comrades serving a just purpose. Kautsky's major error was his failure to recognize that theoretical condemnation would not retard the growth of antirevolutionary elements in the party. He could not follow up his victory in theory with organizational reforms or expulsions that would have "purified" the party membership. Vollmar and his south German reformist forces may have lost the battle, but they soon realized that they were still winning the war.⁴⁸

Bebel had predicted that the agrarian question would persist, and it did. Less than a year after Breslau, the party's propeasant elements received a tremendous new stimulus when the results of the official 1895 occupational census were published. Between 1882 and 1895 the number of middle-sized agrarian holdings (12.5 to 50 acres) had increased, both absolutely and relatively, and the south Germans made much of it. In 1899 Kautsky published *The Agrarian Question*, in which he emphasized the intensity of exploitation of the land, rather than the size of the holding, as critical to the question of survival under capitalism; technical inferiority would doom independent peasants even if the size of their holdings increased slightly. Eduard David, one of the leaders of the SPD propeasant forces, rebutted Kautsky's book in 1903 with his own *Socialism and Agriculture*, which Kautsky, in turn, criticized in a long series in the *Neue Zeit*. But even then the issue did not die. Though the SPD never made great gains among the peasantry, especially in the Catholic-dominated regions of the south, Vollmar and his followers continued after 1895 to direct their energies toward winning peasant converts. In later years, the south Germans became nearly a separate party, pursuing reformism and compromise quite in contradiction of official party policy. Kautsky had said before Breslau that a split at that time was necessary if the party were to avoid becoming an indistinguishable mass of discontents. But having won his point in theory, he was content to let practice take care of itself. In the years after Breslau, he continued to man the barricades of theory while the reformists ignored the party program and solidified their regional power base.⁴⁹

Tactical Issues and the Paris Congress

The proper conduct of a socialist party in a hostile political system was the major tactical question confronting German and international socialism in the years before the First World War. In Germany before 1905, the major problems included in this category were, in addition to the agrarian question, whether or not the party should participate in elections under Prussia's three-class franchise, and the propriety of entering into election compromises with left-bourgeois parties in Reichstag elections. On the international level the particularly thorny problem of if and when a socialist could accept a ministry in a bourgeois government was added to this list. It was a major issue at the 1900 Paris congress of the Second International. Two years earlier a French socialist, Alexandre Millerand, had accepted Premier Waldeck-Rousseau's offer of the ministry of commerce, thus becoming the first European socialist to accept a governmental post under nonrevolutionary conditions and forcing to the fore the issue of the extent to which socialists could cooperate with a nonproletarian government. Those within the French movement who objected to Millerand's action sought to have the International condemn participation. Kautsky's positions on these matters revealed his flexibility on political issues, but were also further examples of his failure to perceive the interaction of theory and practice and his tendency to make overly subtle distinctions.

All of Kautsky's judgments on political questions were predicated on several assumptions. First, he assumed that an independent, socialist, working-class party was a necessity, given the modern class struggle. Second, he rejected as absurd the view represented by the phrase "one reactionary mass" and argued that at times socialists had to support bad liberal candidates against worse reactionary or conservative candidates—the socialists had to use the disunity of the opposition to their own advantage. Third, he was convinced that bad theory was far more dangerous than bad practice and was willing to accept a good deal of practical compromise as long as its justification did not involve deviation from acceptable theory. Fourth, he trusted to the inevitable development of capitalist economics to ensure that the conflicting class interests of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie would always prevent the formation of any but the most transient coalitions between the two. And finally, he felt that certain political forms, namely the traditional bourgeois freedoms and republican government, were of such importance to the workers that the need to defend them could temporarily take precedence over the bourgeois-proletarian class

struggle. According to Kautsky, a staunchly independent, theoretically sound workers' party could use elections and parliamentary activity to advance its own cause by entering into agreements with nonproletarian parties and by siding on certain issues with liberal opponents of the workers against reactionary opponents of the workers.

The 1893 party congress passed a resolution proposed by Bebel rejecting participation in the Prussian Landtag elections because of the three-class franchise system which prevailed there. Under this system the wealthy were favored by a weighted voting system that effectively reduced the possibility of the election of a working-class candidate. Though Kautsky, still in Stuttgart at the time, was cautious about passing definitive judgment from a distance, he was inclined to agree with Bernstein's opposition to the congressional decision. In fact, he soon elaborated this vague position into a strong stand in favor of active involvement in just such situations. In a letter to Adler, he condemned the English Social Democrats, and most of the SPD, for accepting the notion of "one reactionary mass" and not considering the advantages of cooperation with nonproletarian, left-bourgeois parties. He argued that in England and in Germany the socialists were not strong enough to rule, but they were strong enough to influence "the struggles of the old parties with one another and to give them the direction which our interests require." Kautsky felt that it was mostly the youth of the German party for whom opposition to compromise was like "atheistic fanaticism," but he also held that "our leaders blow the same horn," especially Liebknecht.⁵⁰

By 1897 conditions in Prussia and the Prussian Landtag had changed in such a way that various groups in the SPD began to call for reconsideration of the 1893 resolution against participation. The Junkers of Prussia seemed to be gaining strength on the *Land* level, and as regionalism limited the ability of the Reichstag to act, the *Land* representative bodies started taking on more importance. When in early 1897 the Prussian Landtag only narrowly rejected a bill proposed by the Junkers to further restrict assembly and coalition rights, an outcry went up in the SPD for greater involvement in Prussian Landtag elections in order to try to stave off Junker oppression. Kautsky was in full sympathy with this position, and in two *Neue Zeit* articles that appeared before the 1897 party congress, he argued in favor of participation in the Prussian elections. Though he emphasized that the most efficacious kind of electoral agitation was still that aimed at electing SPD representatives, he argued that the Prussian situation offered the party a chance to weaken the Junkers, expand its sphere of activity, intensify the fight for a general franchise in Prussia, and

perhaps even elect some candidates of its own. He pointed out that for years the party had informally followed the policy of voting for left-liberal candidates in Reichstag runoff elections without demanding reciprocity, "not to render those gentlemen a favor, but because it serves the interests of liberal development and the proletariat to let none of the great bourgeois parties get too powerful and the opposition too weak." If this policy was acceptable on the national level, it made even more sense in opposition to the Prussian Junkers. At this time (1897), he also argued that "one reactionary mass" was clearly not prevailing in Prussia, that even the most narrow-minded liberal opponents of the workers had to realize that the Junkers were more dangerous than the socialists.⁵¹ His only caution was this:

As long as we preserve our proletarian character, corruption from cooperation with other parties is not to be feared, even if occasional mistakes, which can nowhere be entirely avoided, should appear. On the other hand, if we give up [our] proletarian character, we lose the firmest ground under our feet and become a ball of the most contradictory interests, like the anti-Semites. Compromises in action are not dangerous, but those in program are.⁵²

Kautsky suggested that the specifics of participation had to be worked out on the local level, and both he and Bebel considered the whole project experimental. At the 1897 Hamburg congress, the main speaker in favor of repealing the 1893 resolution, Ignaz Auer, expressed his own and the party's agreement with Kautsky's sentiments. The resolution in favor of participation in the Prussian Landtag elections passed by 145 votes to 64.⁵³

Two years after the Hamburg congress Kautsky both reinforced and qualified the general position he espoused during the discussion of the Prussian Landtag election issue. The occasion this time was the Dreyfus affair in France. What began as the obscure persecution of a Jewish army officer accused of treason became one of the greatest political causes of the French Third Republic. After the publication in January 1898 of Emile Zola's *J'Accuse*, in which the duplicity and suspiciousness of the charges against Dreyfus were dramatically revealed, the affair quickly developed into a life-and-death struggle between the defenders of the Republic on one side, mainly liberal and socialist politicians and intellectuals, and the enemies of the Republic on the other, mainly the church and the army. Though many French socialists argued that the entire affair was none of their concern, a purely

bourgeois matter, several leading figures of the French movement became convinced that the affair did pose questions of vital importance to socialists, namely the preservation of evenhanded justice, limitations on the power of the army, and the survival of the Republic. Led by the most impressive of their politicians, Jean Jaurès, the French socialists by early 1899 had generally made Dreyfus's cause their own.⁵⁴

Earlier in the Dreyfus affair, in June 1898, Millerand had accepted the ministerial post offered by the Radical leader Waldeck-Rousseau. Both the affair and Millerand's action prompted response from Kautsky. He had high praise and great admiration for Jaurès's stand and argued that nothing could be more disastrous than for a "fighting class" like the proletariat to assume neutrality in a crisis that affected the welfare of the entire nation. It was not only the right, but also the duty of social democrats everywhere to take part in differences between bourgeois parties "in the interests of freedom and humanity." He advised vigorous action on the part of French socialists because the advanced workers would instinctively realize the importance of the affair, and therefore the socialists must take the lead or lose out to the liberal bourgeoisie. Furthermore, he saw the Dreyfus affair as part of what he called "the great reactionary movement" of Europe which was characterized by the advance of militarism and the bankruptcy of liberalism. On the other hand, Kautsky condemned Millerand's action for two reasons. First, the inclusion in the cabinet of General Gallifet, the bloody suppressor of the Paris Commune, made it shameful for any socialist to take part in that government. But more significantly in the long run, Kautsky felt that Millerand had made a serious tactical error, that the Dreyfus affair demanded only that the socialists stand behind the bourgeois ministry in its fight against the military. Though he insisted that the issue was tactical, not theoretical, Kautsky argued that under the circumstances Millerand had unnecessarily exposed himself and the French movement to the dangers of major compromise with the forces of the bourgeoisie.⁵⁵

At the 1900 Paris congress of the Second International, the issues raised by the Dreyfus and Millerand affairs were the center of attention. Kautsky found himself in a curious position at this congress: His resolution, which opposed entering into electoral alliances with bourgeois parties but approved socialist entry into bourgeois governments under extraordinary conditions and with prior party approval, was opposed by the section of the multifaceted French movement that he supported. The *Parti ouvrier français* (POF), headed by Jules Guesde, was generally considered the Marxist wing of French socialism, and of the several socialist parties in France, it had the most

in common with the SPD. But Guesde and the Italian socialist Enrico Ferri proposed their own resolution which condemned participation by socialists in a bourgeois government under any conditions. Kautsky objected to this as too restrictive, because conditions could not be anticipated sufficiently to know what might happen in the future. In tactical matters he felt strongly that socialists had to preserve "the necessary elasticity for the unfathomable future." To defend his position, he offered two examples of when the German socialists might conceivably enter a government of the left-wing parties: to wage a "people's war" against a Russian invasion, or if "fundamental democratic institutions" were in danger and could be saved in no other way. Kautsky's arguments carried the day. After the Paris congress, he took pains to reassert his support for the Guesdists, but he continued to insist that in this case they had erred.⁵⁶

Revisionism

While the debates over participation, defense of republican institutions, and ministerialism were going on, another and ultimately more disruptive crisis was slowly emerging within the ranks of German socialism. This was the theoretical dispute centering on Eduard Bernstein's revisionism. Bernstein began to develop his new views in a series of articles that appeared in the *Neue Zeit*. The series, entitled "Problems of Socialism," ran in eight parts from November 1896 through the summer of 1898, but the active debate raged until 1903 and smoldered long after that. The controversy provoked by these articles eventually came very close to splitting the party, and it destroyed the intimate friendship of Bernstein and Kautsky. It spilled over into the international socialist arena and even today remains one of the most intriguing of the many doctrinal disputes marking the history of socialism. No event in Kautsky's life up to 1914 caused him so much anguish as his split with Bernstein, and nothing forced him to defend his Marxism so carefully and strongly as the confrontation with revisionism.⁵⁷

Ironically, Bernstein's articles appeared in numbers of the *Neue Zeit* containing a polemic between Kautsky and an English socialist, Ernest Belfort-Bax, concerning the nature and limits of the materialist conception of history. The irony was that Bax criticized Bernstein while Kautsky defended his long-time friend. The polemic itself was not particularly imaginative, and as usual in the *Neue Zeit*, it was weighted in Kautsky's favor from the start by virtue of his control of the journal. Kautsky criticized Bax as a false friend who claimed to be a Marxist but was in fact an idealist. Bax countered with attacks on Kautsky for

nit-picking and dogmatism, but was unable to refute Kautsky's points effectively. Karl pointed out that though Bax claimed agreement on three-quarters of the issues involved, the last quarter, the extent to which Bax claimed ideas have independent determinative qualities in history, was what made Bax's position that of a "sentimental utopian." On several occasions during the exchange, Kautsky referred to himself and Bernstein as major proponents of true Marxism. At the end of one article, Kautsky belittled Bax's contention that Bernstein had "unconsciously ceased to be a social democrat" in accepting as inevitable the expansion of capitalism into the Armenian region of Turkey. Before too long, Kautsky would condemn Bernstein for a conscious and dastardly desertion of Marxism in terms that made Bax's criticism seem mild indeed.⁵⁸

Revisionism has already been dealt with in other sources, though its importance has usually been misinterpreted and the depth and substance of its theoretical content exaggerated by American and English scholars. Bernstein's major point was that the SPD should stop talking like a revolutionary Marxian party because it acted like a reformist party willing to work within the existing system. He underpinned this demand with theoretical revisions which rejected the Hegelian, dialectical materialist roots of Marxism and sought to establish a Kantian, ethical socialism as the doctrine of the SPD. Bernstein also denied the validity of the Marxian notions of value theory, recurrent crisis, the prevalence of class struggle, and the need for a purely proletarian political party. His famous dictum emphasizing the importance of the movement itself and the insignificance of its socialist and revolutionary aims ("the goal is nothing, the movement everything") was in fact a clear statement of the theoretical paucity of his position. Bernstein was not a subtle thinker, but an eclectic autodidact. While his revisionist writings may have accurately outlined the position of a certain faction of the SPD, they did not capture the spirit prevalent among the ordinary party members, who shared an intense conviction of the uniqueness of the proletariat and the reality in imperial Germany of the class struggle of orthodox theory. However, those Social Democrats who had long been trying to expand the party's appeal beyond the working class greeted Bernstein's theoretical support for their practical actions with open arms. Men like Vollmar, David, and others welcomed Bernstein's theory as a weapon to be used against the consistent Marxists of the party, at whose head Kautsky stood.⁵⁹

Tremendous amounts of time and energy were squandered on the revisionist controversy in the SPD press and at party congresses. Bern-

stein's theory was officially renounced at the 1899 Hanover congress by a vote of 216 to 21, and again at the 1903 Dresden congress by a vote of 288 to 11. At Hanover, the party specifically rejected its own conversion into "a democratic-socialist reform party," and at Dresden it specifically denied that the class struggle was weakening. Despite the virtual unanimity of opposition to Bernstein, he was still able to stir up controversy because he brought into the theoretical arena the persistent but often covert conflict within the SPD between the moderates and the radicals. The opposing positions had been debated, with Bernstein on the radical side, during the antisocialist law period when the *Sozialdemokrat* and the Reichstag *Fraktion* disagreed on tactics; radicals and moderates had battled over state socialism in the early nineties; they engaged in an ongoing conflict concerning the party's relationship to the agrarian population; and they would dispute many other questions after the revisionism crisis faded away. But in each of these cases, the radical or "orthodox" position represented best by Karl Kautsky won official approval without altering or demanding alteration of party actions that perpetuated the moderate-radical division. The apparent paradox of this situation can only be reconciled if the function of theory in the German socialist movement and in Kautsky's perception of that movement is understood.⁶⁰

Many contemporary observers felt that Bernstein merely brought the party's theory into touch with the political realities of Germany, and most historians have agreed with this evaluation. But in fact this was not so. With the exception of the preservation of the exclusively proletarian character of the party, Bernstein and Kautsky disagreed on very few questions of tactics. Their voluminous debate in party journals and newspapers was almost solely concerned with theory, specifically whether certain Marxian assumptions—value theory, recurrent crisis, concentration, immiserization, and others—fit the available facts or not. And yet the central issue of the revisionism debate was not really the content of the theory but its function in the life of the party. Kautsky recognized this at the 1898 party congress, the first time he made any public statement on Bernstein's new theory. He expressed his astonishment that Bernstein felt compelled to emphasize certain points on which there was in fact no disagreement within the party—that legal activities were more favorable than illegal ones; that the more successful the party was, the more its opponents would be forced into illegal actions; and that the major tasks of the party were democratic and economic reforms and promoting the organization of the proletariat. The disagreement came, according to Kautsky, on the issue of what all this meant. Bernstein, judging from

his observations of England, concluded that through democracy the proletariat could achieve political power, and Kautsky agreed that this was so in England. But in Germany things were different; in Germany no forces for democracy besides the workers existed, so the victory of democracy depended on the victory of the proletariat. Because of this, Kautsky argued, the way recommended by Bernstein would spell disaster in his native country. Instead of urging the workers to cooperate with an undemocratic bourgeoisie, as Bernstein was, in effect, suggesting, official party theory provided the workers with self-confidence, with the certainty of victory. Theory thus became practice for Kautsky; one of the tactics of the party was to teach the workers the reality of the German condition by emphasizing the uniqueness of the proletariat. The rest of the debate between Kautsky and Bernstein revolved around this central point. Both men agreed that cooperation with nonproletarian democratic groups for the peaceful conversion of capitalism into socialism would be ideal, but Kautsky claimed that this path could not be followed in Germany. Conditions there made the radical implications of Marxism valid, and thus he argued vigorously that the Marxian analysis was correct in Germany.⁶¹

This question of whether revisionism or Kautsky's Marxism was more in touch with the realities of the party and Germany is one of the most important in the historiographical literature on the SPD. A great many historians have contended that Bernstein was simply recognizing the nature of the party and rejecting Kautsky's revolutionary language as fantasy. But neither these historians nor Bernstein himself realized that no matter how much the SPD said it wanted to cooperate with bourgeois liberals, two sides are required for cooperation, and most German liberals simply would not join into coalitions with the "unpatriotic," antireligious socialists. Furthermore, Bernstein never confronted the question of what would happen if the socialists won an overwhelming majority of the seats in the Reichstag. The highest representative body in Wilhelmine Germany could not have opposed the wishes of the kaiser and his court clique even if it had wanted to. As Kaiser Wilhelm II delighted in pointing out, if he ordered the army to shoot all the Reichstag representatives, it would. Even though the SPD may have been a central focus of politics in the Second Reich, and even though the kaiser and his men worried about the attitudes of both the Reichstag and the SPD, there really was never any practical hope that either the Reichstag or the socialists would simply grow into power. On the other hand, the situation of a unanimously oppositional Reichstag would have been critical, and the tension created by this situation

would certainly have brought major upheaval to Germany. If this is so, then Kautsky's view of pursuing growth and election as preparation for revolution was eminently realistic, while Bernstein's assumption that revolution could be avoided by gradual growth and compromise was naive.

All this is not to suggest, of course, that theory was incidental to the revisionism crisis or that the long theoretical disputes were sterile intellectual game-playing. Kautsky's view of the function of theory in the working-class movement ensured that he would stoutly defend his "orthodoxy" against Bernstein's assault. For Kautsky, Bernstein's emphasis on the immediate, day-to-day aspects of the movement spelled disaster for the SPD. Without systematic theoretical guidance, the workers would flounder in the morass of petty politics and narrowly focused economic demands. Therefore Kautsky was convinced that defending the theoretical framework which he had laboriously erected for the SPD was vitally important to the survival of the movement.

Kautsky also had a deep personal commitment to Marxism. For almost twenty years he had devoted himself exclusively to the task of studying, clarifying, and popularizing Marx's work. This dedication both reflected and intensified his psychological investment in Marxism, which made the defense against revisionism necessary in personal terms. He revealed this aspect of his response to revisionism when he wrote to Bernstein: "Should sometime the materialist conception of history and the conception of the proletariat as the motive force of the coming social revolution be vanquished, then I would certainly have to confess I would be finished, then my life would have no more meaning."⁶² He was signaling to his friend the depth of his commitment.

The theoretical disputes during the revisionism crisis eventually covered virtually every aspect of Marxism from the materialist conception of history to value theory to the intensity of the class struggle. One particular part of the debate deserves special attention here because of what it revealed about the importance of politics to Kautsky's interpretation of Marxism. This was his discussion of the phenomenon called *Verelendung*, which is somewhat awkwardly translated into English as "immiserization."

Marx had argued that one of the inevitable consequences of capitalist production was the increasing depth and breadth of poverty among the proletariat. He held that this increasing immiserization would lead to increasing social tension in the form of the class struggle,

which in turn would yield the revolution that would introduce socialism. But by the early twentieth century it was clear that in most mature capitalist systems the industrial proletariat was in fact enjoying a rising standard of living. Eduard Bernstein, among others, took this as a sign that Marx's predictions were wrong, and in fact this view was a major precept of revisionism.

Kautsky developed his own mature view of *Verelendung* in response to Bernstein's argument. In so doing he reinforced his contention that class cooperation on a major and long-term scale was not possible in Wilhelmine Germany. He also made politics more important than economics by arguing that the ever increasing class struggle was not the product of "the actual immiserization of the mass of the people," but of the continual social and political assault on the working class made by the ruling classes.⁶³ This may seem a major deviation from Marx's own writings, which fairly clearly and unambiguously asserted that, on the whole, capitalism as an economic system demands the increasing exploitation of the workers in the form of getting more work for less pay. But Marx, too, emphasized politics a good deal, especially in his histories. Furthermore, Kautsky's theory was a response to the realities of German society, where large numbers of organized workers were increasing their real wages, and where increasing political tensions with the growth of the SPD reached new levels by the 1907 Reichstag campaign. These apparently contradictory developments were in large part the basis of the theoretical disputes of revisionism against orthodoxy.

The revisionism crisis was far more than just another doctrinal dispute for Kautsky; it was a serious personal matter that forced him into agonizing reappraisal of his almost twenty-year relationship with Bernstein. The two had been inseparable companions during the Zurich years and while both were in London, and they had maintained a regular correspondence after Kautsky returned to Germany. Besides defending Bernstein against Bax's attacks, Kautsky had long been considering Ede, as close friends called Bernstein, as a possible coeditor of the *Neue Zeit*. Undoubtedly this close personal relationship was the major cause of Kautsky's long delay in attacking revisionism. Though as early as 12 November 1896 he was complaining mildly to Adler about some of Bernstein's minor lapses, not until late 1897 did he directly confront Ede himself, and not until March 1899 did he launch a major attack in print. Other Marxian theoreticians, especially Rosa Luxemburg and Georgi Plekhanov, attacked Bernstein's deviations much more quickly. But not just his close friendship with

Bernstein delayed Kautsky's criticism, he was also receiving contradictory signals from his two main advisors on political matters, August Bebel and Victor Adler.⁶⁴

Once it became clear to Kautsky that Bernstein was falling away from the Marxian fold, he turned to Adler for counsel. Early in March 1898, Karl wrote to Luise: "I do not know what I should think of Ede. What does Adler say about it?" What Adler said was that he did not understand what Kautsky was so upset about. He argued that Bernstein's writings were useful and timely reminders of the need to rethink old positions which may have simply become slogans. But by the spring of 1898, Kautsky had begun to worry about Ede. Tussy Marx reported from London that Bernstein had grown irritable and difficult to live with. She advised Kautsky that Bernstein should be removed from England and brought back into contact with Kautsky and the German movement in order to overcome "Ede's present unhappy sceptical pessimism." In her last letter to Kautsky, Tussy wrote: "You alone can make Ede our own Ede again. It hurts me more than I can say to write this. . . . Ede is so dear a friend that it is horrible to see things as they are just now." Almost immediately Kautsky started trying to devise plans to get Bernstein out of England, suggesting that perhaps he could be made an editor of the *Neue Zeit*, which would at least allow him to live in Zurich. He even asked Adler if it would be possible for Ede to find sufficient work in Vienna and commented, "Ede in Vienna and me in Berlin, of all things that would be [an] upside-down world." However, as Bernstein continued to pursue his revision of Marxism, Kautsky's reaction began to harden. By late May 1898, he was warning Bernstein that his writings were aiding the enemies of social democracy. In August, he wrote to Adler of Ede's "unbelievable theoretical retrogression," but still he felt that a great deal of toleration was necessary. The following month found Bebel entering the fray, noting that Bernstein clearly misunderstood his isolation in the German party. By late September, Kautsky was still expressing his reluctance to attack Bernstein in print, because although "it may begin objectively and friendly, a polemic always ends with a quarrel." Finally on 24 September 1898, Bebel expressed his satisfaction that Kautsky had at last come to realize that Bernstein was beyond salvation and that a break between the two former inseparables was about to come.⁶⁵

Having decided that Ede was no longer a Marxist, Kautsky pursued a three-pronged course vis-à-vis revisionism and Bernstein personally. First, in his letters to his friend, he became increasingly sharp in his criticism and more and more strongly urged Bernstein to show the

courage of his convictions by ending his affiliation with the *Neue Zeit* and leaving the party. Second, in his public critique of Bernstein, Kautsky tried to moderate the growing severity of attacks by people like Luxemburg and Plekhanov by writing conciliatory articles. And third, in personal terms he wrestled with his attachment to Bernstein, the contradictory advice from Bebel and Adler, and his growing distress with Bernstein's failure to admit and live up to the isolation of revisionism within the party. Karl honestly sought to avoid the bitter split he dreaded but thought inevitable. To Bernstein, he wrote: "You declare false the value theory, the dialectic, materialism, the class struggle, the proletarian character of our movement . . . what of Marxism is left there?" He insisted that Bernstein was capitulating the bourgeois critics by trying to find a compromise between liberalism and Marxism. He warned that their cooperation could not continue because "as long as I edit [the *Neue Zeit*], it will be an organ of Marxism, not an eclectic organ à la *Soz[ialistische] Monatshefte* or *Revue socialiste*."⁶⁶

Adler's advice was to avoid forcing Bernstein further to the right by moderating criticism of him still more. Adler felt that the tactical differences were not significant, but he did recognize that Kautsky "must tear his soul away from Ede, . . . the Kautsky-Bernstein double star no longer exists." Adler also warned against expelling Bernstein from the party because he might be more dangerous outside than in. But Bebel took a strikingly different position in the dispute. Besides arguing that Bernstein's tactics were fundamentally different from those of social democracy, Bebel also tied tactics and principles to one another, calling the revisionist controversy the "to be or not to be" of the party. Bebel argued that Adler had misjudged Kautsky's position, that Karl had tried for a year to "save" Ede. By late 1898, Kautsky had given up hope that Bernstein would leave the party and the *Neue Zeit* voluntarily. Although terribly saddened by Ede's position, he knew that nothing could prevent a nasty break.⁶⁷

Bernstein, following Kautsky's suggestion, collected his observations into a book, and in March 1899 this most comprehensive statement of revisionism was published. It was entitled *The Presuppositions of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy*, but its English translations are usually called *Evolutionary Socialism*. In order to set a moderate tone for the party discussion that was sure to follow publication, Kautsky and Bernstein both encouraged Adler to be the first to respond to the book. Adler reluctantly accepted the challenge, but cautioned Kautsky about his own "philistine scorn of theory," saying that he approached the book with "the preconceived desire to find it possible that Ede and the

very, very many who are with him do not stand outside the scope of the party." This caution did not prevent Kautsky from writing Adler letters on two successive days denouncing Bernstein's book in no uncertain terms. "What [Bernstein] writes about the materialist conception of history is shallow platitude," Karl claimed; "about the dialectic, simply absurd; about value theory, baseless." Although the editors of the *Vorwärts* were pressing him to attack Bernstein, he declined to do so until he heard from Adler. But he also reported that he would give Dietz an ultimatum: "Either B[ernstein] goes or I go." Apparently Karl carried out this threat at a 16 March meeting attended by Dietz, Singer, Bebel, and Kautsky. All but the first agreed that Bernstein's close association with the *Neue Zeit* would have to end. When Dietz balked at dropping Bernstein unless he left of his own free will, Kautsky reported to Adler, "I replied that then I would go." In a later letter to Adler, Bebel supported Kautsky's account of the meeting.⁶⁸

As far as Kautsky's role in the revisionist controversy was concerned, 16 March 1899 was an important day: He received the reassuring news that, having read Bernstein's book, Adler was more upset with Bernstein than with Kautsky. Adler was bothered by Bernstein's arrogance, by his assumption that he was the "only cool head" in the party. But Adler was even more disturbed by the degree of cooperation with the bourgeoisie called for by Bernstein. Although he finally wrote to Bernstein urging that he end his permanent association with the *Neue Zeit*, the Austrian socialist leader also cautioned Kautsky against siding with the "literati and fanatics," like Plekhanov and Parvus. Adler still insisted that Bernstein's "foolishness" had not gone so far as to place him outside the party. On this day Kautsky's first lengthy public criticism of Bernstein appeared in the *Vorwärts*.⁶⁹

On the following day Karl expressed his relief upon learning about Adler's negative response to *Evolutionary Socialism* and noted that he was receiving many other negative responses as well. He explained his relief to Adler in this way: "After the aplomb with which Ede came forward in Stuttgart, one had to think he was overlaid with factual material, and now he has nothing other than a few hastily gathered, meaningless numbers from the *Handbook of Political Science*. That is a scandal for anyone who has the British Museum at his disposal." As for his own critique, the second installment of which appeared on 17 March, Kautsky contended that "it was as mild as possible," but he promised a sharper attack in the *Neue Zeit*.⁷⁰

Shortly after Kautsky's first critique of Bernstein appeared in the *Vorwärts*, Bebel began to goad the party theoretician on to a sharper

attack. Having given Kautsky more than two years to overcome his reluctance to criticize his friend, Bebel had decided that the time had come to strike hard against a dangerous deviation. This was the first of many times Bebel was to encourage Kautsky to adopt a more vigorous line of criticism. The party leader wrote to Karl: "I want to advise you to pounce sharply on Ede in working out your [new] articles; just no vagueness. Your articles for the *Vorwärts*, as I heard from many sides, did not make the impression they should have." Bernstein found Bebel's position curious because the dogmatism of his theory contrasted with his clearheaded practical leadership. But Bebel's view, in direct contrast to Adler's, was that just because Bernstein attracted a following, especially among the leading figures in the party, revisionism had to be pursued to the point of a break. While Kautsky, concerned about Bernstein's well-being after he left the *Neue Zeit*, discussed with Adler plans to set Bernstein up as the head of an English workers' secretariat to provide the continental press with regular information on the English movement, Bebel continued to marvel at how little Bernstein seemed to understand the precariousness of his position in the German movement. Bebel strongly advised Bernstein to admit the irreconcilability of his dispute with Kautsky and to leave the *Neue Zeit* voluntarily.⁷¹

Finally, the first phase of the revisionism crisis came to a close in late 1899. In preparation for the impending Hanover congress, Kautsky wrote his rebuttal to Bernstein's book and sent the proofs to Bebel for review. Bebel's immediate response was strongly positive. He felt that at last Bernstein would have to realize that further cooperation with Kautsky was impossible, and also that Bernstein, "if he possesses a morsel of self-awareness, will see how he goes astray." But a few days later Bebel sent Kautsky a sharply worded letter criticizing the last part of the second chapter of Karl's book. Bebel was very distressed that Kautsky had suggested that perhaps the party program should be changed in certain places, feeling that this was a concession to Bernstein that "powerfully weakened" Kautsky's critique. Bebel at first admitted that these changes might be necessary later, but that the time was not right for suggesting them; two days later he decided that no program changes were justified. When Kautsky accepted Bebel's criticisms and made all the recommended alterations, Bebel once again expressed his pleasure with the book. Bebel also praised Kautsky's *Neue Zeit* article aimed at setting the stage for a renunciation of Bernstein's views at Hanover in October. Of course that congress soundly rejected revisionism, and in May 1900, Bernstein announced his withdrawal from the journal to readers of the *Neue Zeit*. A few months earlier the

formal break between the two friends had been marked when Kautsky stopped signing his letters to Bernstein with the nickname "Baron," used only with close party comrades and friends, and began to sign himself "K.K." or "K. Kautsky." This split lasted for some years.⁷²

Relations between Kautsky and Bernstein deteriorated even further after 1900, despite Adler's efforts to preserve peace. For a time the prevalent emotion on Kautsky's part was sadness at the loss of a dear friend. From the Paris congress of the Second International, in September 1900, he wrote to Luise: "I also saw Ede. Victor [Adler] once again had the need for a great reconciliation scene. We touched hands and asked, *wie geht's*, and separated again. And that is all." But the persistence of the revisionist forces soon converted Kautsky's sadness into anger. He could not understand why Bernstein insisted on remaining in the party and felt that by so doing Ede was simply poisoning the SPD in order to destroy it. Kautsky's view was that the revisionists "do not form the right wing of our party, but a new party which is too cowardly or too weak or too unclear to detach itself from us, and which therefore bores into us." In the summer of 1901, Kautsky cut short a cold-water cure he was taking at the Sulz spa in Austria because he felt the need to return to Berlin to defend the *Neue Zeit* from the assaults of "Bernstein and his people." He had gone to Sulz to recover from the nervous stress brought on by overwork and the revisionist controversy.⁷³

Despite Kautsky's wish to end the debate, revisionism persisted, and Bebel's frequent urgings to strike against the revisionists and their reformist allies forced a continuation of the polemic. Late in 1901, Bebel urged Kautsky to criticize those in the party who favored protective tariffs, which the party had traditionally opposed, and shortly before the 1903 Dresden party congress, Bebel once again exhorted Kautsky to be more severe with the revisionists. The loss of Bernstein's friendship, coupled with the constant aggravation of the polemic against the revisionists, sometimes made Kautsky long for Austria. He frequently expressed a feeling of alienation from even his closest German contacts like Bebel. He claimed that Adler was the person to whom he felt closest, but added that despite all the difficulties he would not leave Germany. "For my intellectual and political development," he wrote to Adler, "Germany is . . . more advantageous than Austria, and I dare not exchange this for anything."⁷⁴

Between 1900 and 1904, Kautsky formulated a view of revisionism that explained the emergence of the doctrine as a result of European-wide developments in the politics of modern, capitalist society. Although he based his evaluation largely on the German situation, he

also applied his analysis to other countries, especially France. The extent to which the revisionist debate and the continued political isolation of the SPD radicalized Kautsky's thought was clearly revealed in the tone of his work after 1900. Basically, he saw revisionism, the faction of French socialism led by Jaurès, and the emergence of a new progressive party in England with the decline of the Liberals as examples of the "renaissance of bourgeois radicalism." He argued that these groups formed a "historically necessary manifestation" that could achieve certain things that the socialists could not.⁷⁵

But they cannot replace social democracy. They much more presuppose a strong social democracy . . . which stiffens their backbone and moves them forward. The new party must remain theoretically fruitless because it wants to reconcile contradictions, [and] is therefore incapable of a unified position and must behave eclectically, must live on loans from socialism and liberalism, and finally, because of these contradictions, the new party can only lead an ephemeral existence. . . . Bernstein's historical role is this: that in social democracy he first gave expression to this need and with that loudly spoke the silent heartfelt desire of an entire section of the people.⁷⁶

Kautsky faulted Bernstein for failing to fulfill his historical role in Germany, for not breaking away from the SPD to form a left-bourgeois oppositional party.

To support his thesis in the case of Germany, Kautsky marshaled a wide variety of arguments, taking off in almost all cases from claims made by revisionists. For instance, to counter the revisionists' contention that class conflict was declining because the workers were gaining concessions from the system, he argued that this position failed to take into account collateral advances of the power of the capitalists. Thus, while it was true that the number of workers' consumer cooperatives was increasing, the concentration of capital was increasing at a faster rate; trade unions were growing, but employers associations were expanding more rapidly; and while legislation that protected workers was increasing, state support for capitalism, as in growing military expenditures, was increasing even more. Kautsky concluded from this that the lines were being more clearly drawn between bourgeois and social democratic forces. While the upper ranks of the bourgeoisie tied themselves more and more closely to the government, the lower ranks were cut adrift. Instead of the famous reactionary mass, socialists were faced with a "reactionary confusion."

Into this confusion moved the revived petit bourgeois radicalism that Kautsky associated with revisionism, and that he had earlier associated with the south German, peasant-oriented faction of the SPD. At the same time he argued that the increasing strength of the German workers forced the upper bourgeoisie, mainly the large industrialists and financiers, to become increasingly conservative and to rely more and more on the brutal tactics of the Junkers. His most convincing evidence of this tendency was the failure of the German liberals to cooperate with the SPD in opposition to the Junker and agrarian demands for higher tariffs and the increasing support of liberals for military expansion.⁷⁷

Kautsky also used more strictly political arguments to substantiate his theory. He argued that the revisionist dream of a great coalition of the left was a chimera because where social democracy was strong, liberalism was weak. Both drew their support, in large part, from the same sources and therefore could not both be strong together. As evidence of this Kautsky cited the dismal failure of the coalition concept as applied to the Prussian Landtag elections. He argued that although the election of SPD representatives was good, the decline in the number of Radical representatives matched the socialist increases, leaving the balance the same. For Kautsky this also proved that "German liberalism, given the opportunity, prefers the conservatives to the Social Democrats, . . . [and this] can henceforth be considered an irrefutable rule which is only confirmed by the rare exception." Thus the SPD must not rely on the liberal bourgeoisie; liberalism would continue to decline as socialism advanced.⁷⁸

However, Kautsky did not conclude from this political analysis that the SPD could grow into power in Germany simply by winning votes and mandates. He insisted that the established forces would not allow that, and furthermore that the modern parliamentary system was a sham. In very radical terms he denied that infrequent elections among a widely scattered, poorly informed electorate yielded anything but a parliament that was a tool of domination by the ruling classes. He called for close party control of SPD representatives who had to be responsible to the majority, that is, the entire party, not the minority, that is, the separate constituencies. With this demand, Kautsky reached a high-water mark in his radicalization in the wake of the revisionist challenge. He was responding to what he thought was a dangerous erosion of the ideal of proletarian independence which the revisionist concept of coalition represented. He was also responding to the fact that a large percentage of SPD Reichstag and Landtag members favored revisionism. Unfortunately for his own views, Kautsky

once again was unable to translate his theoretical criticisms into organizational reforms. The character of the party remained unchanged.⁷⁹

While he recognized the difficulties of fighting revisionism in the German party, Kautsky was content with theoretical condemnations by various party congresses, especially the 1903 Dresden meeting which passed an unqualified rejection of Bernstein's theory. But since Kautsky also saw revisionism as part of a European-wide phenomenon, he felt the need to deal with the matter in the Second International. At the 1904 Amsterdam congress of that body, the SPD's Dresden resolution against revisionism was presented by Jules Guesde in the form of an international resolution. By passing this the Amsterdam congress would achieve two things. First, it would condemn any sort of regular socialist support for bourgeois governments. Jaurès and his followers, although they had adhered to the letter of the Paris resolution against entry into a bourgeois government, had been supporting Waldeck-Rousseau's cabinet since the Dreyfus affair. Guesde, Kautsky, and others saw this as a violation of the spirit of the Paris resolution and a reformist subterfuge. Second, if a strongly united International congress were to come down on Guesde's side against Jaurès, the former's position would be greatly strengthened in France, and the unified French socialist party everyone sought would emerge with a more radical orientation than that favored by Jaurès.⁸⁰

Emile Vandervelde, the leader of Belgian socialism, and Victor Adler argued in favor of a counterresolution at Amsterdam that would have kept the question of relations between socialists and the bourgeoisie where Kautsky's Paris resolution had left it, namely a rejection of participation but not necessarily of informal cooperation. Jaurès argued in favor of this position, saying that the Guesde resolution would simply impose the political impotence of the German party onto the whole of international socialism. The commission appointed to draft the resolution approved Guesde's version, and the congress as a whole passed it also, twenty-seven to three with ten abstentions. Yet despite this apparent victory, Kautsky was dissatisfied with the results, and he was especially upset by Adler's support for the more moderate resolution. After the congress he patched up the differences with his Austrian friend, explaining that a chance to isolate and eventually eliminate Jaurès and his reformist followers had been missed at Amsterdam. Karl was angered that Adler and Vandervelde had spoiled the necessary spirit of unanimity, thus leaving the door open to Jaurès. He did not consider Adler himself a "secret revisionist," as Bebel had contended at Amsterdam, and in fact claimed that with

respect to Austria, Adler's tactics were perfectly acceptable. But he did think that Adler was too easy on the deviations of others and not sufficiently sensitive to the dangers of revisionism or reformism.⁸¹

In a sense, the three years before the outbreak of the Russian revolution of 1905 represent an hiatus in Kautsky's career. In 1902, he published a book, *The Social Revolution*, in which he forcefully reiterated his orthodox line, and the success of the book encouraged him to believe that the way was being won, although he still had few illusions about the number of committed Marxists in the party. The year 1903 brought two major victories—the Reichstag elections, which gave the party more than a quarter of the popular vote and sent eighty-one socialists to the new house, and the Dresden congress which seemed to defeat the revisionists. But despite these achievements Kautsky was not entirely happy with things in the movement. For some time he had complained of a sort of "nervous degeneration" among the current group of German socialists. The iron men of the past, said Kautsky, men like Marx, Engels, even Lassalle and Liebknecht (who had died in 1900), were gone, and young and old alike stagnated. He argued that this resulted from "the rise of petty work, . . . because they see no great problems before them."⁸²

Nonetheless, he still had great hope for the future. Even before the 1903 elections, Kautsky had perceived that "a great nervousness goes through the Reich." He anticipated that the stagnancy would soon come to an end since the government was being increasingly squeezed between an intractable agrarian-bourgeois ruling group and a rapidly growing, united socialist movement. He insisted that this situation could not last long.

If [the government forces] imitate Gladstone and Waldeck-Rousseau, [if] they buy the leaders of the proletariat through some kind of cooperation, then we will have the same split which exists in France.

But that is not likely. Neither the kaiser nor the Junkers and great industrialists are so clever as to follow this policy, which is most dangerous for us, which [Chancellor] Bülow would certainly do. Rather the opposite is to be expected. . . . we will catch a strong wind from above which [will] weld the party together and force the leaders of opportunism either to renounce opportunism or to join one of the less dangerous parties, . . . where they actually belong and to which they will be pulled when the comfort of social democracy comes to an end, and it does not merely pass out mandates, but also demands sacrifices.⁸³

Kautsky realized that many might think this overly optimistic, but added, "what does life hold if one is not optimistic, if one does not see in the immediate future what will perhaps first be attained by our grandchildren?" This optimism was to be sorely tested by events after 1905.